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Founded in 1963 by two prominent Austrians living in exile – the sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the economist Oskar Morgenstern – with the financial support from the Ford Foundation, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, and the City of Vienna, the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) is the first institution for postgraduate education and research in economics and the social sciences in Austria. The **Political Science Series** presents research done at the Department of Political Science and aims to share "work in progress" before formal publication. It includes papers by the Department's teaching and research staff, visiting professors, graduate students, visiting fellows, and invited participants in seminars, workshops, and conferences. As usual, authors bear full responsibility for the content of their contributions.

Das Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS) wurde im Jahr 1963 von zwei prominenten Exilösterreichern – dem Soziologen Paul F. Lazarsfeld und dem Ökonomen Oskar Morgenstern – mit Hilfe der Ford-Stiftung, des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Unterricht und der Stadt Wien gegründet und ist somit die erste nachuniversitäre Lehr- und Forschungsstätte für die Sozial- und Wirtschafts-wissenschaften in Österreich. Die **Reihe Politikwissenschaft** bietet Einblick in die Forschungsarbeit der Abteilung für Politikwissenschaft und verfolgt das Ziel, abteilungsinterne Diskussionsbeiträge einer breiteren fachinternen Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen. Die inhaltliche Verantwortung für die veröffentlichten Beiträge liegt bei den Autoren und Autorinnen. Gastbeiträge werden als solche gekennzeichnet.

Abstract

A great deal of recent research on voting behavior in the European Parliament (EP) concludes that party groups dominate legislative behavior, effectively organizing political competition along ideological rather than national lines. As a result, some argue that the EP is a suitable arena for transnational political contestation. We re-examine several empirical findings used to support these conclusions. Based on an analysis of a novel set of data regarding EP votes that are unrecorded, we argue that the empirical basis for these conclusions is dubious. The fundamental finding is that roll call votes, which form the basis of studies of legislative voting behavior, are a biased sample of legislative votes. This calls into question the accuracy of any description of party unity or the character of party competition on legislation that is gleaned from roll call votes in the EP. In addition, our findings indicate that party groups hide the vast majority of legislative votes from the eyes of voters, therefore obfuscating legislative behavior. Thus, while the EP is often identified as a source of democratic accountability for EU policy-making because its members are directly elected, our findings suggest that in practice party groups significantly obstruct this channel of popular control over policy-making.

Zusammenfassung

Jüngsten Forschungen zum Wahlverhalten im Europäischen Parlament (EP) kommt zum Schluss, dass die Fraktionen der unterschiedlichen politischen Parteien das legislative Verhalten beeinflussen. Dadurch wird politischer Wettbewerb im EP entlang ideologischer und nicht nationaler Linien organisiert. Daraus folgt, dass das EP eine geeignete Arena für transnationale politische Auseinandersetzungen darstellt. Wir überprüfen nochmals verschiedene empirische Resultate, die diese Schlussfolgerungen unterstützen. Basierend auf der Analyse eines neuen Datensatzes behaupten wir, dass die empirische Basis für diese Schlussfolgerungen bedenklich ist. Denn die namentlichen Abstimmungen, welche bisher als Basis zu Studien zum legislativen Abstimmungsverhalten gedient haben, stellen ein verzerrtes Sample für eben solche dar. Es stellt sich somit die allgemeine Frage, inwiefern die bisherige Beschreibung von Parteikohäsion oder die Charakterisierung von Parteienwettbewerb in der Legislative noch Gültigkeit besitzen. Unsere Resultate weisen außerdem darauf hin, dass die Fraktionen den Großteil ihrer legislativen Abstimmungen vor den Wählern verbergen und somit ihr legislatives Verhalten verschleiern. Obwohl das EP häufig als Quelle für demokratische Legitimation in der EU-Politikgestaltung genannt wird, zeigen unsere Resultate, dass in der Praxis die verschiedenen Fraktionen die Kontrollmöglichkeiten der Bürger signifikant behindern.

Keywords

European Parliament, Roll Call Votes, Legislative Voting Behavior, Party Cohesion.

Schlagwörter

Europäisches Parlament, Namentliche Abstimmungen, Legislatives Wahlverhalten, Parteikohäsion.

General note on content

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the IHS Department of Political Science

Notes

Matthew Gabel gave a Public Lecture in the context of the Departmental Research Seminar Political Science on November 27, 2003

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1. Introduction

A number of recent studies have examined whether the European Parliament (EP) is a suitable arena for contestation among transnational political interests, where European national political parties re-align themselves in European parties reflecting transnational political conflict and provide voters with an electoral connection to EU policy-making (e.g. Hix, Noury, and Roland 2003; Kreppel 2002; Raunio 1999). In this paper, we re-examine the conclusion drawn in the literature that party groups—coalitions of national party delegations in the European Parliament—successfully organize legislative behavior in the EP such that nationality is dominated by shared transnational political interests defined mainly along traditional left-right political lines.

Based on analysis of a novel set of data regarding EP legislative behavior, we will argue that the empirical basis for these conclusions is dubious.[1] In addition, we discuss how party group management of legislative votes affects the transparency of EU policy-making and therefore the quality of accountability and representation in the EP. The major conclusion on this front is that party groups hide the vast majority of legislative votes from the eyes of voters, therefore obfuscating legislative behavior. Thus, while the EP is often identified as a source of democratic accountability for EU policy-making because its members are directly elected, my findings suggest that in practice party groups significantly obstruct this channel of popular control over policy-making.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first section surveys a variety of recent studies of voting behavior in the EP designed to examine positive questions about the level of party group cohesion and the character of party group competition. They examine whether a supranational party system exists and how it organizes political conflict. These data have also been used to address more general questions of normative democratic theory related to European integration. Adopting a "responsible party" model of democracy for the EU, this research has concluded that party groups, at least in terms of organizing the legislature, function in a manner consistent with normative expectations about party cohesion and competition.

The second section revisits the empirical basis for these positive and normative conclusions. Previous analyses of voting behavior in the EP rely on roll call votes. But roll call votes represent only a small fraction of EP votes and, importantly, the selection of votes for roll call may be endogenous to the level and type of conflict among MEPs. Thus, before we draw conclusions from roll call votes about the character of the party system in the EP, we need to

1 The dataset is described more generally and used to address more general issues of roll-call vote analysis in Carrubba, et al. (2003).

evaluate whether roll call votes are a representative sample of voting behavior. Using a novel dataset of information about votes not decided by roll-call, we conduct such an analysis.

The third section of the paper discusses how the sampling properties of roll call votes affect our conclusions about party group cohesion and competition. We also discuss how the prevalence and pattern of roll call vote requests affects the transparency of policy-making in the EP. The concluding section discusses what voting behavior and the use of roll calls indicate about whether the EP provide a forum for the articulation and contestation of transnational political interests and an electoral connection between voters and policy-makers in the EP.

2. Party Groups, Voting Behavior, and the Responsible Party Model

A long research tradition in comparative legislative behavior has focused on evaluating the importance of parties to legislative politics and the character of the party system. These studies usually examine two aspects of legislative voting behavior: the level of intra-party cohesion/unity and the character of inter-party conflict (Collie 1985:475). Specifically, scholars use summary statistics of the similarity of voting patterns among members of parties to evaluate party cohesion and the dissimilarity of voting patterns across parties to define the character of inter-party policy conflict. Applying this framework to the EP, students of legislative behavior in the European Parliament have used the voting behavior of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to evaluate the importance of party groups to legislative politics in the EP.

Empirical research on MEP voting behavior has generally supported two conclusions regarding party group (PG) cohesion and competitiveness. First, PG cohesion is higher than cohesion by nationality, is objectively high for the major party groups, and has generally increased over time. Studies of RCVs in the EP in the 1980s and early 1990s showed high PG cohesion (Attina 1990; Brzinski 1995; Raunio 1997). Raunio (1997:34) showed that, in three-quarters of RCVs for the major PGs, 90% of MEPs voted with the PG line. Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999) used correspondence analysis of 100 RCVs from 1989-1994 to confirm that PGs are a stronger influence on voting coalitions than nationality. Kreppel (2001) analyzed 300 RCVs from 1980–1996, also using correspondence analysis and demonstrated high PG cohesion over this period.

Recent studies confirm these findings. Hix (2001; 2002), analyzing RCV data from July 1999 to July 2000, showed that PG was a stronger determinant of voting behavior than nationality or individual MEP ideology. Similarly, Noury (2002) and Thomassen, Noury, and Voeten (2002) showed that PGs were the strongest determinant of vote choice from 1989–1999 and

that PG cohesion has increased over time. Finally, Hix, Noury, and Roland (2002) have analyzed all RCVs since the advent of direct election to the EP. This comprehensive study showed that PG cohesion has remained high since 1979 and has increased with the legislative power of the EP.

The second general conclusion is that legislative politics in the EP is competitive, with PGs generally distinguishing themselves along one main ideological dimension that reflects traditional left-right political conflict found at the domestic level in the EU member-states. This conclusion is based on several analyses of vote patterns among MEPs across a variety of issue areas. The basic methodology of these analyses is to evaluate how PG affiliation relates to these vote patterns. If MEPs of the same PG commonly vote together and they vote differently from MEPs of other PGs on some issues, then this indicates competitiveness. And, if the policy areas that account for whether and which PGs differ in voting behavior are those that commonly define the left-right dimension, then the character of this competition is left-right.

A broad set of studies, based on RCVs, shows that indeed PG ideological distinctions affect MEP voting behavior and PG coalition behavior. Raunio (1997) showed that coalitions of PGs on RCVs are explained by their proximity on the left-right dimension. Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999) and Kreppel (2000; 2001) add important context to this conclusion, showing that the level of left-right ideological competition varies temporally. In particular, the frequency of "grand coalitions" between the two largest PGs has increased over time. But left-right ideology remains an accurate characterization of policy differences and competition in the EP. Based on a larger number of RCVs, Noury (2002) and Thomassen, Noury, and Voeten (2002) identify four dimensions to competition in the EP, but show that the dominant dimension is left-right. Hix (2001), analyzing RCVs from 1999, and Hix, Noury, and Roland (2002), using the full set of RCVs from 1979–2001, show that inter-PG competition in the EP has been along a single left-right ideological dimension. This pattern has been stable over time.

This characterization of the EP, if accurate, has important implications for our understanding of legislative politics in the EU, the development of a European-level party system, and the quality of representation in the EU. It also speaks to the prospects for a well-functioning parliamentary democracy at the EU level. With the growth in the scope of EU competency at the expense of national legislative authorities, a variety of academics, journalists, and politicians have expressed concerns about the quality of democratic control over EU policy-making (Weale and Nentwich 1998; Blondel, Sinnott, and Svensson 1998; Schmitt and Thomassen 2000). Many scholars consider the PGs as essential to improving the quality of democracy in the EU. In different forms, these scholars appeal to a "responsible party" model when evaluating the quality of democratic control in the EU (e.g. Thomassen, Noury, and

Voeten 2002; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).[2] According to this model, parties serve as the crucial connection between voters' interests and policy-making. To do this, they must provide different policy programs to voters, voters need to vote based on their preferences over policy programs, and parties must behave cohesively in executing their programs when involved in policy-making.

These RCV results suggest that PGs meet the requirements of the responsible party model, at least in terms of legislative behavior. MEPs vote according to their PG affiliations – resulting in high internal PG cohesion – and PGs differentiate themselves from each other according to their ideological positions on the Left-Right dimension. Consequently, Hix, Noury, and Roland (2002) conclude that the EP functions as a "normal" parliament, resembling the legislatures of the EU member-states in terms of party cohesion and the character of competition. And, as Thomassen (2002:18) argues, a single left-right dimension to policy conflict is important, as it facilitates voter-party correspondence in policy positions. To see this, note that representation is facilitated if voters' preferences across the range of policy areas under EU authority are captured by particular parties. This is difficult to attain if the policy space is multidimensional. But if voters and parties share a common ideology, which serves as a shorthand for different packages of policies, then voters can more easily connect their policy preferences with the policy programs on offer by parties. Thus, the apparent commonality between the left-right ideological dimension characterizing voters in the national arena and party groups in the EP is advantageous from the view point of the responsible party model.[3]

In sum, the recent empirical studies suggest that party groups in the EP have successfully developed a transnational party system in the legislature, with ideological interests dominating national interests in policy-making. What is more, these findings indicate that, if European elections were reformed to allow PGs, rather than national parties, to organize and contest the elections, we could imagine a dramatic improvement in the connection between voter preferences and policy-making in the EU. However, as we argue in the next section, the reliability of these conclusions hinges critically on the quality of RCV data.

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2 Note that our purpose here is not to advocate or critique this normative model. We describe the model because it is the motivation for much of the empirical analysis we discuss below.

3 But see Gabel and Anderson (2002) and Gabel and Hix (2002), as a well as Marks and Steenbergen (2003), for a more thorough discussion of the level of correspondence between party conflict in the EP and voter preferences over EU policy.

3. Reconsidering MEP Voting Behavior

For most legislative years, over 3/4 of votes in the EP have not been by roll call. This obviously raises the question of whether roll call votes are an appropriate sample of voting behavior for inferring the level of party group cohesion and the character of party group competition. What is more, party groups, who predominantly request roll call votes (RCVs), have incentives to select RCVs based on their expectations of the level of cohesion and of the type of political conflict associated with the vote. These strategic considerations could well cause a selection bias that would generate RCVs that are atypical in terms of party group cohesion and competition.

While numerous arguments have been made about the selection of votes for roll call, here we highlight two of the most common ones.[4] The first argument claims that PGs may use RCVs to influence legislative outcomes. As Kreppel (2001:128) states, PG leaders have the ability to reward or punish their membership through a variety of means.[5] However, PG leaders cannot exercise party discipline without some way of monitoring their members' behavior. Thus, PG leaders have an incentive to request RCVs when they want to enforce party discipline. They will try to employ this tactic on bills they consider important, for which the outcome of the vote is uncertain, and where they anticipate inducing party cohesion.[6]

The second argument posits that PGs use RCVs to signal their or other groups' policy positions to a third party, such as a national electorate or another EU institution (Kreppel 2002:128). In particular, a PG may want to publicize its policy agenda, to embarrass a rival PG by revealing its low cohesion on a particular policy, or to distinguish themselves publicly from other PGs on particular policies they deem significant.

If these arguments are correct, selection bias is likely to undermine inferences about intra-party unity or inter-party policy conflict based on RCVs. For example, one of the main findings in the EP literature is an objectively high level of PG cohesion. If the arguments presented above are correct, we cannot trust such conclusions because the decision to request a roll call is endogenous to the expected level of cohesion. Furthermore, the signaling arguments imply that the sample of RCVs is endogenous to the policy agendas of the PGs requesting roll calls. That is, PG leaders, pursuing their political agenda, choose among votes for roll call so as to highlight or conceal policy conflict or consensus among PGs or MEPs. This behavior could cause RCV samples to diverge in important ways from a random sample of policy areas, and thereby lead to incorrect inferences about the character of policy conflict and the dimensionality of voting cleavages.

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4 See Kreppel (2002:128–9) for an extremely thorough discussion of these possible strategic motivations.

5 For example, PG leaders control the granting of committee seats.

6 One could also imagine that PG leadership might use roll calls to monitor whether members honor vote-trades.

As a result of these concerns, we would like to know whether there is evidence that RCVs are being requested strategically and, if so, how severely the bias may be affecting existing findings. To this end, we have collected information about non-RCVs for the 1999–2000 legislative year. These data will allow us to examine the representativeness of RCVs on three important dimensions.

First, EP votes vary in terms of their legislative import. For example, some votes are on non-binding resolutions and others could serve to veto actual legislative texts. Because the stakes increase with the importance of the legislative vote, the importance of the votes is probably related to the level of divisiveness. Thus, there is every reason to believe that actual cohesion will differ with the importance of legislative votes.[7] In fact, if we observe legislatively more important votes systematically unrecorded, we should be particularly concerned about uncritically relying upon RCV samples.

Second, EP votes vary by issue area. If RCVs are a nonrandom sample by issue area, this will obviously provide additional evidence that PG leaders are requesting RCVs strategically. However, it also provides two additional important substantive insights. For one, it will provide valuable information about whether RCVs are accurately portraying the dimensionality of the EP policy space. If committees responsible for certain issue areas never have RCVs, then we know by definition RCV analysis will not find those issue areas defining a dimension of policy conflict. Also, it will provide valuable information over whether RCVs are accurately portraying PG cohesion and conflict. If only certain issue areas tend to see RCVs, then issue areas in which there are low levels of internal PG cohesion and high levels of cross PG cohesion may be hidden in the unrecorded votes.

Third, EP votes vary by requesting PG. The pattern of roll call votes across PGs provides perhaps the most direct test over whether PGs are using RCVs strategically. Learning who makes roll call requests will indicate how accurately RCVs characterize the dimensions of policy conflict within the EP. Because different PGs have different legislative agendas, the more we observe certain PGs disproportionately requesting RCVs, the more likely it is that these votes are not accurately characterizing policy cleavages within the EP.

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7 Note the problem may persist even if observed cohesion is similar across more and less legislatively important votes. PG leaders are unlikely to request RCVs that show internal incohesion regardless of the vote importance. Consequently, we might observe little variation in cohesion by vote importance yet a selection bias would persist.

Before proceeding to the analysis it is worth noting that these three RCV attributes closely map to the three characteristics that Hix, Noury, and Roland (2002) explicitly state are central to justifying the use of RCVs in light of possible selection bias:[8]

We cannot exclude the possibility that MEP behavior is different in roll call votes than in other votes. However, it is reasonable to assume that roll call votes are used for the most important decisions. *Also, roll call votes are the only votes we can study in detail, the number of roll call votes has increased over time,* roll call votes are called on the full range of issues in the European Parliament, *and* roll call votes do not appear to be called disproportionately by any party group. *We can thus be confident that the systematic analysis of roll call votes provides an accurate picture of the European Parliament {emphasis added}.*

Therefore, according to Hix, Noury, and Roland (2002), one cannot draw reliable inferences about EP legislative behavior from RCVs if we demonstrate that these three conditions do not obtain.

3.1 Data and Analysis

To evaluate these three characteristics of EP votes, we collected and analyzed a novel dataset including all votes in the EP plenary sessions from July 1999 to July 2000—the first year of the fifth directly elected EP.[9] We chose this year because it was readily comparable with data on RCVs from that period already collected and analyzed in Hix (2001; 2002).

Details of the complete dataset are available from the authors. Here we focus on four attributes of these votes: 1) the **method of vote**; 2) the **type of motion**; 3) the **responsible committee** for each legislative motion; and 4) the **requesting group** for each RCV. The **method of vote** indicates whether the vote was by roll call or not.[10] The **type of motion** indicates whether the vote was on a Resolution, a legislative proposal considered under the Consultation procedure, a legislative proposal considered under the Assent procedure, or a legislative proposal considered under the Codecision procedure. If the vote was under the Codecision procedure, we also identify whether the vote was in round I, II, or III. The

8 Hix (2001a; 2002a) provides a very similar defense of RCVs as a reasonable sample of MEP legislative behavior.

9 The data were collected from the Minutes of the Proceedings of Plenary Sessions, acquired from *Europarl: The European Union On-Line* (www.europarl.eu.int/plenary/default_en.htm).

10 The EP uses one of four methods for casting votes: 1) voice; 2) hand; 3) electronic; or 4) roll call. Voice and hand votes only record whether the motion passed, electronic votes record the final tally of the vote, and roll call votes record exactly how each legislator voted. The default method of voting is by voice or hand. Electronic votes occur when a voice or hand vote is too close to call, and RCVs occur if a party group or thirty-two members issue a formal request for a roll call. A small number of votes—e.g. the Commission investiture—require a RCV.

responsible committee indicates the name of the committee responsible for reporting the motion to the floor. The **requesting group** indicates which EP PG, if any, requested the RCV.

Each of these attributes can be used to evaluate one of the three vote characteristics discussed in the previous section. First, the type of motion serves as a proxy for legislative import of the vote. Resolutions and Consultation votes are primarily symbolic.[11] Votes cast under the Assent and Co-decision procedures can have a direct and substantial impact on legislative outcomes.[12] Codecision I votes are non-binding votes, but they can have strategic importance since the Council will have to take the EP's position into consideration in later rounds. And Codecision II, Codecision III and Assent votes all have direct influence on what form the policy takes and/or whether the motion passes at all. For a further defense of this hierarchy of legislative procedures, see Appendix I.

Second, the responsible committee serves as a proxy for issue area. The EP committees have jurisdiction over specific sets of policy areas. For example, the EP has a committee responsible for agriculture and rural development. Thus, examining which responsible committees' legislative texts are voted on by roll call provides one reasonable standard by which to evaluate whether some issue areas tend to be over or under-represented in RCVs.[13] Third, identifying the requesting group obviously allows us to directly evaluate which groups tend to make RCV requests.

The critical inferential question here is whether RCVs represent an unbiased sample of EP votes. We address this issue mainly through standard statistical tests of significance for differences between the sample of votes—the roll call votes—and the population of votes. The null hypothesis throughout the ensuing analysis is that any deviation in the distribution of

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11 Resolutions are EP motions not directly associated with any piece of legislation. They tend to be general statements of position on some issue of the day, or declarations stating that the EP would like to see legislation on a particular issue. Consultation procedure votes are also largely symbolic. While the EP can temporarily slow down the legislative process by delaying consideration of legislation, the EP can only issue non-binding opinions on the legislative proposals under this procedure.

12 Under the Assent procedure, the EP can veto the motion under consideration. Under the Codecision procedure, the effect of an EP vote depends on whether it is a round I, II, or III vote. Codecision I is similar to the Consultation procedure in that the EP issues an opinion. However, if the EP and Council of Ministers—which consists of member-state representatives—do not reach an agreement, a second round of deliberation occurs. At that point, the EP can amend or reject the Council's common position. If agreement is still not reached, then Codecision III begins with the bill being referred to a Conciliation Committee, which is comprised of members of the Council and EP. If a compromise is reached in the form of a joint text, it is referred back to the EP and Council for a final vote. If an agreement cannot be reached, the bill falls.

13 By relying upon the responsible committee to define the issue area, we are dependent on the jurisdictional distinctions utilized by the EP. While for some studies interested in the issue area of a piece of legislation this might be a problem, it is not one for our purposes. We are simply interested in identifying if there is an apparent pattern of over or under-representation across the EP's jurisdictional divisions. As long as committees have or share responsibility for bills that relate to their jurisdictions, then observing bills from that committee being over or under-represented is informative. For example, if all votes from the fisheries committee are unrecorded, we would reasonably be able to conclude that votes on fisheries issues are being under-represented.

RCVs across the relevant categories (e.g. the type of motion) from that of the population of votes is due to chance. In other words, the null hypothesis is the assumption (sometimes implicit) justifying past RCV analyses. We evaluate this hypothesis with *z*-tests and chi-squared tests, depending on the character of the question.

Note that the previous literature has not reached consensus on what counts as a vote. Some studies suggest that it is important and relevant to include votes on amendments when studying RCVs (Hix 2001a, Hix 2001b, Hix forthcoming, Kreppel and Tsebelis 1999, Raunio 1997). Others ignore amendments and focus only on final votes (Attina 1992; Brzinski 1995). Thus, to be consistent with past studies, we report results under both conventions.

We begin by describing the composition of the RCV sample in terms of type of motion and then consider the whether it is representative sample. Table 1 presents the frequencies and percentages of each of the types of motions for RCVs. As can be seen, when only final votes are analyzed, the most common vote is a Resolution and the least common votes are Codecision II, Codecision III, and Assent votes. In fact, of the 141 roll calls on final votes, only three (or 2%) are Codecision II, Codecision III and Assent votes.

Table 1: Percent and Number of RCVs by Type of Motion

Type of Motion	**Final Votes** **%** **Raw numbers**	**Final Votes and Amendments** **%** **Raw numbers**
Resolution	58.9 **83**	86.7 **1124**
Consultation	25.5 **36**	7.9 **103**
Codecision I	13.5 **19**	5.0 **65**
Codecision II	.7 **1**	.2 **3**
Codecision III	.7 **1**	.08 **1**
Assent	.7 **1**	.08 **1**
Codecision II, III and Assent	2 **3**	.39 **5**
Total	141	1297

Now consider the sample properties of the RCVs. First, simply consider frequencies between resolutions and legislative votes. As table 2 demonstrates, if we only consider final votes, resolutions make up a slightly larger, but not statistically significantly larger, proportion of RCVs than they do of all votes (χ^2=1.82). However, once amendments are also included, they comprise a much greater proportion of RCVs than of all votes (χ^2=756.3).

Table 2: Percent and Number of votes and RCVs by Type of Motion

Type of Motion	*All Final Votes* % Raw numbers	All RCVs on Final Votes % Raw numbers	All Votes % Raw numbers	All RCVs % Raw numbers
Legislation	46.75 **324**	41.13 **58**	51.52 **2405**	13.34 **173**
Resolutions	53.25 **369**	58.87 **83**	48.48 **2263**	86.66 **1124**
Total	693	141	4668	1297
Chi-Square Statistic		1.82 ($p < .18$)	756.3 ($p < .001$)	

Next consider frequencies among the various types of legislative votes. As Table 3 demonstrates, Consultation votes and Codecision I votes comprise a larger percentage of RCVs than they do of all votes, while Codecision II, III and Assent votes comprise a smaller percentage of RCVs than they do of all votes. A chi-squared test rejects the hypothesis that these differences are due to chance.[14]

Table 3: Percent and Number of Votes and RCVs by Type of Legislative Vote

Type of Motion	All Final Votes % Raw numbers	All RCVs on Final Votes % Raw numbers	All Votes % Raw numbers	All RCVs % Raw numbers
Consultation	45.83 **176**	60.00 **36**	45.24 **1088**	59.54 **103**
Assent	4.17 **16**	1.67 **1**	0.67 **16**	0.58 **1**
Codecision I	18.75 **72**	31.67 **19**	27.90 **671**	37.57 **65**
Codecision II	12.76 **49**	1.67 **1**	25.74 **619**	1.73 **3**
Codecision III	2.86 **11**	1.67 **1**	0.46 **11**	0.58 **1**
Codecision II, III, and Assent	23.5 **76**	5.2 **3**	26.9 **646**	3.9 **5**
Total	324	58	2405	173
Chi-Square Statistic		22.02 ($p < .001$)	88.57 ($p < .001$)	

14 We can also reject the null hypothesis that the sample of RCVs is randomly selected if we treat resolutions as just another legislative motion ($X^2=11.8$ on final votes, $X^2=770$ on all votes).

From these findings we can draw several conclusions. The first is simply that there is demonstrable evidence that RCVs are systematically requested according to the type of motion. Whether we consider just the difference between resolutions and legislative motions, just the difference among legislative motions, or resolutions and types of legislative motions simultaneously, RCVs are not a random sample of the population of votes. Thus, this analysis provides the first evidence that roll call votes are being requested strategically by PGs. Second, the votes that by any reasonable *ex ante* definition can be considered the most legislatively important—Codecision II, III, and Assent—are dramatically under-represented as a proportion of the total population of votes. One out of sixteen Assent votes and three out of 619 Codecision II votes had roll calls requested. And, as the chi-squared test demonstrates, *this is not by accident or chance*. Thus, this evidence strongly suggests that PG leaders are making sure that these most important votes are specifically not decided by roll call.

Third, as Table 1 demonstrated, besides being under-sampled, these most important votes also comprise an extremely small percentage of the pool of RCVs. Thus, if we are interested in understanding MEP legislative behavior, this RCV dataset is simply inappropriate. We would be trying to infer legislative behavior from a sample of votes that are procedurally the least legislatively important votes, and that both MEPs and PG leaders treat as different from the more legislatively important votes. For a further discussion of different definitions of "important votes", see Appendix II.

Now consider the distribution of RCVs by responsible committee. As Table 5 shows, there were nineteen committees in the 1999–2000 EP. The table reports the number and proportion of votes on texts referred out of each of these committees for RCVs and for all votes. As the Chi-squared statistic indicates, the null hypothesis is rejected at a very high level of statistical significance. More specifically, looking at table 4, we see that a majority of RCVs originate in just a few committees. Three committees account for 63.88% of RCVs, but only 28.35% of all votes. That is, their percent of RCVs is *more than 100%* higher than their percent of all votes.

Table 4: Responsible committee by all votes and RCVs (Final Legislative Votes)[15]

Committees	**All Votes** **%** **Raw numbers**	**RCVs** **%** **Raw numbers**
Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)	10.22 **47**	15.69 **16**
Budgetary Control (CONT)	6.09 **28**	1.96 **2**
Budgets (BUDG)	5.43 **25**	6.86 **7**
Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE)	8.26 **38**	10.78 **11**
Parliament's delegation to the Conciliation Committee	2.39 **11**	0.98 **1**
Conference of Presidents	0.43 **2**	0.00 **0**
Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)	1.74 **8**	4.90 **5**
Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport (CULT)	2.17 **10**	0.00 **0**
Development and Cooperation (DEVE)	2.83 **13**	0.98 **1**
Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON)	8.48 **39**	13.73 **14**
Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)	2.61 **12**	0.98 **1**
Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy (ENVI)	10.22 **47**	5.88 **6**
Fisheries (PECH)	6.52 **30**	9.80 **10**
Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy (AFET)	5.00 **23**	2.94 **3**
INDU	1.52 **7**	0.00 **0**
Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy (ITRE)	9.78 **45**	5.88 **6**
Legal Affairs and the Internal Market (JURI)	8.04 **37**	8.82 **9**
Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism (RETT)	6.96 **32**	9.80 **10**
Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities (FEMM)	1.30 **6**	0.00 **0**
Total	460	102
Chi-Squared Statistic	46.95 ($p < .001$)	

15 Note that motions can be associated with multiple committees.

Table 5: Responsible committee by all votes and RCVs (Final Legislative Votes and Amendments)[16]

Committees	All Votes % Raw numbers	RCVs % Raw numbers
Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)	5.26 **212**	5.99 **65**
Budgetary Control (CONT)	2.36 **95**	3.87 **42**
Budgets (BUDG)	10.79 **435**	6.82 **74**
Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE)	13.22 **533**	16.04 **174**
Parliament's delegation to the Conciliation Committee	0.27 **11**	0.09 **1**
Conference of Presidents	0.20 **8**	0.00 **0**
Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)	9.20 **371**	33.00 **358**
Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport (CULT)	2.16 **87**	0.00 **0**
Development and Cooperation (DEVE)	1.54 **62**	0.09 **1**
Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON)	5.93 **239**	14.84 **161**
Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)	2.58 **104**	1.47 **16**
Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy (ENVI)	19.02 **767**	0.55 **6**
Fisheries (PECH)	3.67 **148**	2.76 **30**
Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy (AFET)	4.74 **191**	2.76 **30**
Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy (ITRE)	8.87 **358**	5.81 **63**
Legal Affairs and the Internal Market (JURI)	4.61 **186**	3.50 **38**
Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism (RETT)	4.36 **176**	2.40 **26**
Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities (FEMM)	1.24 **50**	0.00 **0**
Total	4033	1085
Chi-Squared Statistic	1147.5 ($p < .001$)	

16 Some motions had more than one associated committee.

When we examine amendments and final votes in Table 5 we observe that this trend strengthens. Not only is the distribution significantly different in both tables, but even with amendments included, four committees still have no RCVs. For example, there were fifty votes on amendments or final texts from the committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities, but *none* by roll call.

This finding is clearly important for understanding legislative behavior. Because some issue areas are totally unrepresented in the RCV sample, 1) RCV analysis necessarily will miss dimensions defined by those issues, and 2) if those issues happen to have unusually high or low levels of intra-party conflict, cohesion will be mischaracterized as well.

Finally, consider the distribution of RCVs by requesting group presented in Table 6. First, from a simple cursory examination of the data it is obvious that roll call votes are unevenly requested across party groups. The two largest party groups – the PPE and the PSE – as well as a few of the smaller party groups – Verts/ALE, TDI, and the ELDR – request the bulk of the roll calls. Second, whether you consider final votes alone, amendments alone, or total votes, roll call votes are not requested proportional to party group size. A chi-squared test rejects this hypothesis at the .001 threshold. Thus, RCVs are not being proportionally requested by any reasonable standard.

Not only is the actual pattern in requests massively divergent from proportional, but if you compare requesting patterns between final votes and amendments, you see that different groups are using RCVs for different purposes. The PPE requested the bulk of the RCVs on final votes (47.49%), while the Verts/ALE, the TDI, and the ELDR requested the bulk of the RCVs on amendments (26.95%, 12.91%, and 11.77%, respectively).

Table 6: RCV Requesting Groups on Legislative Final Votes and Amendments[17]

RCV Requesting Group	Party Group Size	Final Votes	Amendments	Total Votes
		%	%	%
	# of Members	Raw Numbers	Raw Numbers	Raw Numbers
Europe of Democracies and Diversity (EDD)	16	2.33	6.81	5.88
		4	**48**	**52**
European Liberal Democratic and Reform Parties (ELDR)	53	9.50	11.77	11.31
		17	**83**	**100**
Communists (GUE/NGL)	50	5.59	7.80	7.35
		10	**55**	**65**
Party of European Socialists (PSE)	175	16.20	9.79	11.09
		29	**69**	**98**
Technical Group of Independent Members (TDI)	32	3.35	12.91	10.97
		6	**91**	**97**
Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN)	22	2.23	9.79.	8.26
		4	**69**	**73**
Greens (Verts/ALE)	45	11.73	26.95	23.87
		21	**190**	**211**
European Peoples' Party (PPE/DE)	233	47.49	9.93	17.53
		85	**70**	**155**
President	-	1.12	0	.23
		2	**0**	**2**
MEPs	-	1.12	2.41	2.15
		2	**17**	**19**
Not Available	-	0	1.84	1.47
		0	**13**	**13**
Total	626	179	705	884
Chi-Squared Statistic		110	9907	10030

These findings also strongly reaffirm our concerns that the policy space may not be accurately characterized. Unless we assume the legislative agendas of all the party groups are identical, the characterization of the policy space almost certainly is being distorted. The EPP disproportionately dominates the sample consisting only of final votes and small parties like the Greens and TDI disproportionately dominate the sample if you include amendments.

17 Note that some RCVs are requested by multiple parties.

4. Implications for Existing Findings Regarding the Party System in the EP

In presenting the statistical results, our main priorities were to demonstrate the existence and severity of the sampling problem. These findings both provided systematic evidence that there is a major strategic component in the decision to request RCVs and demonstrated that RCVs are likely to be misrepresenting legislative behavior. In this section, we evaluate specific results in the EP literature in light of what we learned from this RCV analysis. As we will demonstrate, the results of our analysis completely undermine the central findings in the literature.

First, all three sets of findings are inconsistent with the conditions Hix, Noury, and Roland (2002) assume in justifying the use of RCVs to study MEP voting behavior. RCVs are not used for the most important decisions, they are not called on the full range of issues, and they are not called proportionately by party group. Thus, according to their own standards, their evidence of a "normal" EP party system is highly suspect.

Second, one of the two major conclusions regarding voting behavior in the EP is that policy conflict in the EP is predominantly over left-right issues. Our results indicate this is, at best, dubious. For one, notice that the committees most likely to deal with socioeconomic issues related to the left-right ideological dimension have a relatively small number of RCVs. Hix (2001:680) identified social policies and environmental policies as key components of the left-right dimension. The tables show that votes on texts from the related committees are relatively rare among RCVs and, more importantly, highly under-represented relative to the total number of such votes.

Why does this matter? Hix (2001), and much of the related literature, conclude that PG coalitions tend to organize by ideology (i.e. PGs of the left tend to vote together and PGs of the right tend to vote together). However, the fewer the number of votes used to estimate intra-party cohesion and inter-party conflict in a particular policy area, the less confidence we should have in how accurately those votes are representing the true levels of cohesion and conflict in that area. Thus, even in the best circumstances —i.e., where the selection of the RCVs is random, it is quite possible that these votes would still misrepresent voting behavior on left-right issues because these conclusions are based upon a very small sample of left-right ideological votes.

In addition, a recent study by Thomassen, Noury, and Voeten (2002) assessed the congruence between the dimensionality of MEP attitudes regarding different policies, as reported in surveys, and MEP voting behavior, as indicated by RCVs. They found that MEP policy attitudes are structured by three issue domains: integration-independence, socio-economic Left-Right, and libertarian-traditional. In contrast, like previous RCV studies, they

found only a single left-right dimension underlying MEP voting behavior. Why this difference in dimensionality? Our analysis provides an explanation for part of this incongruence in findings. To see why, consider the fact that only the surveys found a libertarian-traditional dimension. One of the policy issues that defined the "libertarian-traditional" issue domain involved women's rights—specifically, a woman's freedom to decide on abortion. Looking at Table 5, we see that while there were 50 votes on legislation for which the responsible committee was the Women's Rights and Equal Opportunity Committee, *none* of these votes were by roll call. Consequently, it seems extremely unlikely that RCVs would capture a cleavage among the MEPs characterized by this libertarian-traditional dimension. But, given that the survey of MEPs revealed such a dimension, we might well expect that, *had these 50 votes been recorded*, an analysis of RCVs would reveal a different dimensionality of policy conflict. That is, a libertarian-traditional issue domain may indeed characterize legislative policy conflict, but the selection bias in requesting roll-calls would hide it from view. Consequently, our analysis provides an explanation for this aspect of incongruence in the findings reported in Thomsassen, Noury, and Voeten (2002). And, even more importantly, this demonstrates how that the observed RCV bias by responsible committee generates the general finding of one dimension of conflict in RCV studies.

Third, the other major conclusion in the literature is that intra-party cohesion is high and inter-party cohesion is relatively low. There are several reasons to doubt this conclusion. The first point is a recapitulation and extension of a point made previously. Simply put, most scholars are interested in studying RCVs because they want to understand how the EP does or might influence legislative outcomes in the EU. Answering this question requires examining behavior on votes that actually have legislative consequences. Without such consequences, MEPs could easily be engaging in cheap talk. And, by implication, what we can learn from those votes is highly problematic. Thus, any study interested in explaining cohesion and conflict in the EP necessarily should be examining votes MEPs care about casting. However, the analysis by types of motion demonstrated that legislatively important votes are a very small proportion of the pool of votes and are systematically selected out of the RCV sample. As we also demonstrated earlier, this observation holds with as inclusive a definition of "most important" votes as you wish to use. Thus, conclusions over levels of intra-party cohesion and inter-party conflict are being drawn from a particularly bad sample of data.

Moreover, the analysis shows that standard statistical analysis of RCVs cannot accurately evaluate cohesion. To begin with, note that traditional measures of party cohesion (e.g. agreement scores) should be treated as sample statistics in legislatures where RCVs are a sample of legislative votes. This point, of course, would be true in the absence of our analysis. This is important because, we are unaware of any published studies that report party cohesion scores and report a standard error for the estimate. Measures of average levels of vote agreement for a party, for example, are usually an average across all RCVs, and thus they are sample statistics that have some uncertainty associated with them.

Lacking a measure of sample variability, we cannot assess with confidence the level of party cohesion or make meaningful comparisons of cohesion across time or across PGs.

This problem is easy to correct if the sample is random. All one would need to do is calculate a standard error for the estimate and then re-interpret the findings accordingly. But the analysis indicates that, for RCVs in the EP, *this solution is unavailable*. When a sample is randomly selected, then the central limit theorem ensures that the sampling distribution is normal, allowing us to interpret the results with traditional confidence intervals. But, strictly speaking, when the sample is non-random, then statistical theory does not provide guidance in calculating sampling error because the shape of the sampling distribution is unknown. This non-random nature of RCVs undermines descriptive inferences about party cohesion. Even if the estimates are unbiased—which we doubt is true—we cannot use the sample to calculate confidence intervals around the estimates of party cohesion. Indeed, the sampling error associated with nonrandom samples is potentially much higher than that for random samples.

We think it is hard to over-state this point. Since we are typically interested in comparing the level of party cohesion across parties and across time, the measure of variance around the estimates is crucial to inference. We strongly suspect this is a fundamental problem in the study of voting behavior in other legislatures, since many do not record all legislative votes. However, the gravity of this problem in other national or sub-national legislature is difficult to assess because scholars commonly fail to report even the percent of legislative votes that are recorded. In sum, except in cases where all legislative votes are recorded or where the scholar is exclusively interested in voting behavior on recorded votes, our analysis indicates we fundamentally cannot interpret estimates of party cohesion based on RCVs.

Finally, the analysis has important implications for whether policy-making in the EP contributes to the transparency and accountability of EU authority. As discussed in section I, a great many journalists and scholars identify the EP as a critical source of democratic legitimacy for the EU, at least in part because it allows public scrutiny of policy-making and it provides voters with an electoral connection to policy-making. As in democracies generally, roll call votes are an important institution for transparency and accountability in the EP (Carey forthcoming-a, b).

The results of our analysis suggest otherwise. Most of EP votes are not available for scrutiny, thus denying voters the opportunity to monitor the behavior of their elected representatives. That is not to say that party groups obfuscate all legislative behavior—e.g. speeches or committee reports. But party groups selectively reveal one of the most important legislative acts, voting. Our results indicate that the selection of votes is far from random, thereby

providing voters with an atypical view of behavior. Obviously, the biased selection of votes for roll-call also limits the transparency of policy-making.[18]

5. Conclusion

Given these findings, we are far from confident that the EP is a "normal" parliament, where parties are cohesive in voting behavior and competition is along traditional left-right lines. Instead, what our evidence shows is that PG leaders are strategic in how they use roll calls. This may indicate some organizational sophistication, but it means that much of the important legislative voting occurs out of public view. This is bad for the study EP legislative behavior and bad for normative concerns regarding the responsible party model described earlier.

Recall that RCV studies have indicated that PGs fit the responsible party model in terms of legislative parties. This evidence has been used to support arguments for institutional reforms to strengthen the EP so as to improve the link between voters and policy-makers in the EU. Our analysis indicates that such conclusions and arguments are suspect; RCVs likely provide a poor test of whether PG cohesion and competition in the EP is consistent with this model.

The study also has an important implication regarding the value of roll call votes as a tool to enhance democratic accountability. Our results show that the selection of roll call votes by party leadership can undermine this transparency. In the EP, we see that PG leaders seldom request roll calls on the votes that are presumably of greatest import to voters and instead often request roll calls on the votes that have the least legislative impact. Clearly, this does not enhance transparency. Indeed, it undermines it, by allowing party leaders to hide legislators' behavior selectively from voters, which may be more insidious than holding only secret votes. As a final note, we *support* using RCVs to analyze EP legislative behavior. We believe the next logical step is to derive and incorporate an explicit model of RCV requests that will allow scholars to control for these biases when they analyze RCVs. Fortunately, previous studies provide valuable information about the motivations and context of roll call vote requests (e.g. Kreppel 2002) that inform a model of roll call vote requests. The appropriate theoretical model of roll call vote request could then be used to estimate Heckman selection bias models of legislative voting behavior that rely upon RCV data. Such models would temper our inferences about party cohesion and the dimensionality of party conflict in light of the selection process.

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18 Of course, one might consider this sort of obfuscation a necessary evil, allowing party groups to maintain cohesion in the face of divisive pressures from varying constituent demands (Carey forthcoming-a).

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Appendix I

It is important to highlight that MEPs themselves recognize this same hierarchy of importance across types of motions. Scully (1997) demonstrated that, for RCVs on legislation from November 1993 to April 1995, MEPs were more likely to participate in votes on the types of motions we have define as important than in votes on the less important types of motions. As Table 7 illustrates, this same variation in MEP participation is also apparent for the time period of our study—based on the data used in Hix (2001). It is noteworthy that Scully (1997) did not consider participation on resolution votes, which we classify as among the least important votes. Table 1 shows that, consistent with our expectations, participation rates on Resolutions and Consultation votes are lower than rates for Assent and Codecision II and III votes. Thus, apparently MEPs differentiate among votes according to the same criteria we have identified regarding the importance of votes.

Table 7: Attendance of RCVs by Type of Motion

Type of Motion	**Nov. 1993—April 1995 (Scully data)** ***Number Absent***	**July 1999—June 2000 (Hix data)** ***Number Absent***
Resolution	…	193
Consultation	329.5	256
Codecision Total	257	…
Codecision I	…	120
Codecision II	…	109
Codecision III	…	182
Assent	176.5	111

Appendix II: A Caveat on 'Most Important' Votes

For most scholars, the reason to study party cohesion and policy conflict in legislatures is to understand how legislators behave when legislative outcomes are at stake. Thus, we would like to select votes that are "important" in the sense that they are or simulate a consequential vote on legislation. An obvious strategy for selecting such votes is to choose only those that involved legislation where the vote could affect the outcome. We adopted this strategy, justifying it in an earlier section based on characteristics of the legislative process and the participatory behavior of MEPs. But one might argue that some non-binding votes – i.e. Codecision I votes, Consultation votes, and Resolutions – are also important votes in the sense that MEPs behave "as if" it were a consequential vote on legislation. For Codecision I votes, this claim is not implausible. While we would argue that the Codecision II, and III votes are still more important because they are the votes that directly affect legislative outcomes, Codecision I votes could well be used by the EP to signal policy positions to the Council in anticipation of the round II and III votes. For Consultation votes this argument is not plausible. Since the EP can never do more than issue an opinion under the Consultation procedure, there is no reason for the Council to take its position into account.

Finally, for Resolutions the situation is somewhat more ambiguous. On the one hand, resolutions can be used to signal policy positions to the Commission on potential or future legislative proposals. For example, the EP passed three resolutions between 1984 and 1989 requesting the Commission to protect media pluralism in a directive designed to liberalize cross-national broadcasting (Harcourt 1998:375). For issue areas that would fall under the Codecision procedure, these signals may be important since, again, the EP will eventually be able to cast binding votes on the topic. On the other hand, many resolutions are simple position-taking statements on current events and not associated with some potential policy. In addition, we might expect the sorts of political pressures that national parties, constituents, and PGs impose on MEPs when their vote is consequential for legislation to be absent on Resolutions. If this is true, then MEPs may not vote on Resolutions "as if" they were legislative votes. Thus, the proper characterization of resolutions is ambiguous in terms of their "legislative" nature. Consequently, it is extremely important to note that, *even with a generous characterization of what constitutes an important vote*, our previous conclusions stand. To see why, consider the following two scenarios.

First, imagine that half of the resolutions and all Codecision I votes are put on par with Codecision II, III, and Assent votes. The sample of RCVs would remain highly contaminated with legislatively insignificant votes. Sixty-three out of 141 final votes and 665 out of 1297 total votes remain legislatively insignificant resolutions and Consultation votes. Thus, if we are interested in MEP behavior on important votes, then the sample would remain undesirable.

Second, one might argue that all RCVs on resolutions should be considered important simply because those are the ones that PGs considered important enough to decide by RCV. That is, we could assume that RCVs are important *because* they are RCVs. It turns out that the typical roll call vote on a resolution is an amendment (478 of 594), of which a majority are called by the Verts/ALE, the TDI, or the UEN (260), of which most are rejected (220). Thus, we have to believe that rejected amendments to non-binding resolutions by three small PGs are important votes, on par with votes that actually, directly influence EU legislative outcomes. Further, we also have to assume that such votes are indicative of the character of policy conflict in the EP over the EU legislative agenda. Otherwise, our estimate of inter-party policy conflict based on these RCVs is necessarily inaccurate. One might seriously doubt that the policy agenda of these groups, particularly on amendments to resolutions, reflects the overall EU legislative agenda.

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